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SUBJECT: SLOVAK PRIME MINISTER FICO ADVANCES H1N1 CONSPIRACY THEORY

REF: A. 09 BRATISLAVA 475
[1](#)B. 09 BRATISLAVA 494

CLASSIFIED BY: Keith Eddins, Charge d'Affaires, a.i..
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Calling the H1N1 influenza pandemic a "game of pharmaceutical companies," Prime Minister Robert Fico declared this week that he "doesn't believe in swine flu" and will not get vaccinated. This is just the latest in a series of occasionally paranoid conspiracy theories asserted by Fico in the last few months--he has previously alleged a conspiracy by Slovak media organizations against him, suggested that the financial crisis may have been intentional, and even expressed fear that he might be assassinated for knowing too much about the murky financing of opposition political party SDKU.

[1](#)2. (U) Even though the H1N1 outbreak has largely subsided in Slovakia, it remains in the news as the bulk of the 1 million vaccines purchased by the government last fall have only recently started to arrive. Perhaps due to a sense that the worst has passed, Slovaks appear to have little interest in the vaccines--the government estimates that only six percent of health workers and one percent of pregnant women have been vaccinated despite strong encouragement by the Ministry of Health. Fico's widely reported comments will presumably do little to increase the number of Slovaks seeking to be vaccinated; Minister of Health Richard Rasi weakly responded that he looks forward to trying to convince Fico that his theory is "not entirely correct."

[1](#)3. (U) The Slovak government reported six new confirmed H1N1 cases last week, bringing the overall total to 1192, including 51 deaths. (NOTE: this figure only includes laboratory-confirmed cases of H1N1; it is widely believed that the number of unreported cases runs in the tens of thousands. END NOTE.)

COMMENT

[1](#)4. (C) Setting aside Fico's apparent taste for conspiracy theories, his comments seem intended to distract from the ongoing scandal surrounding the government's purchase of H1N1 vaccines. The protracted procurement negotiations lasted more than three months during the height of the outbreak, and questions were raised almost immediately about a lack of transparency and seemingly inflated price paid for the vaccines. Darina Sedlakova, the WHO Director for Slovakia, told us at the time that the procurement process was "highly irregular."

EDDINS